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## Monastery and Book of Deer

Posted on [23/06/2017](#) by [John Cairns](#)

Scottish legal historians who have an interest in the Middle Ages are all familiar with the importance of the Book of Deer. The Book of Deer is an illuminated manuscript of the Gospels (though not in their entirety, now held in Cambridge University Library. It had once belonged to the great collector, Bishop Moore, who acquired some of manuscripts, notably the Moore Bede, through the Scots scholar and dealer, Alexander Cunningham. There is no reason to associate Cunningham’s activities with Moore’s acquisition of the Book of Deer. Indeed the good Bishop probably acquired it from his friend Thomas Gale.

The Book of Deer is a tenth century manuscript written by a single scribe in an Irish hand. What makes it of interest to legal historians is the legal material inserted into it when the MS was at Deer. Some of this is in Gaelic, making the Gaelic *notitiae* the earliest surviving medieval Scots Gaelic, as well as a Latin brieve of David I.

In 2009 Katherine Forsyth edited a new collection, *Studies on the Book of Deer*, published by the Four Courts Press of Dublin. This contains new editions and translations of the legal material. It is an important work.

What has inspired your blogger to revisit this is the note in today’s BBC Scotland website that a search is on again for the old monastery, the one referred to in the Book of Deer. Its site has never been located, though the ruins of the later Cistercian monastery are known and, indeed, charming, though it is many years since your blogger, one side of whose family comes from Buchan, has visited them.

But in the collections in the Book of Deer, Gaelic, Pictish, and Norman Scotland all come together. It is of tremendous importance.

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